



March 11, 2005

Dear Samantha:

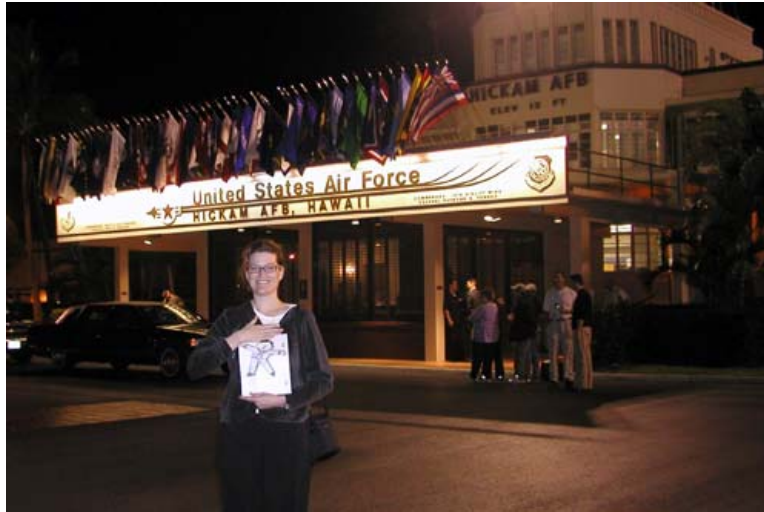
Thank you for sharing your Flat Stanley with me. My name is Karin and I work for President George W. Bush at the White House in Washington, D.C. I work in an office called USA Freedom Corps. My office's mission is to strengthen volunteer service in our Nation. We work with Federal agencies like the Peace Corps, Citizen Corps, and the Corporation for National and Community Service; with non-profits; and we work to make sure Americans of all ages know about the need for, and the rewards of, volunteer service and what they can do to help a neighbor. You may have seen our new website for kids – www.usafreedomcorpskids.gov. I hope you like it.

When I received your Flat Stanley in the mail, I was just getting ready to go on a trip to Asia with former Presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton (or 41 and 42 as we call them – do you know why we call them that?) to view damage from tsunami that hit on December 26, 2004. Since this was such a unique experience, I decided to take your Flat Stanley with me! Or sort of. I couldn't take the original Flat Stanley you sent me because he didn't have the immunizations needed to make the trip. But, I did take a copy of your Flat Stanley and he went all the way to Asia and back with me!

Our trip started out in Washington, D.C. on February 17, 2005. We flew from D.C. to Los Angeles to meet up with the two former Presidents in Burbank where Air Force Two (the Vice President's plane) was waiting for us.



From there we flew to Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii to refuel...



...then to Andersen Air Force Base in Guam for another refueling and a crew change.



Finally, after about 27 hours of flying, we landed in Phuket, Thailand. Neither Flat Stanley nor I had ever been to Thailand. What a beautiful country! And the people are so very friendly and gracious.

We both had our first ever helicopter ride in Thailand – two seats down from the 41st President of the United States!



While we were in Thailand, we visited a village that lost over 1,000 people to the tsunami. It was very sad. We saw some children who had lost both of their parents.



Thanks to the support of their remaining family and friends, these children still miss their parents a lot, but appear to be doing well. They are going back to school and getting care and love from those around them.

We also saw fishing boats that needed to be repaired or replaced.



Fishing is the main occupation of the village we went to, but because of the damage, not that many people are fishing right now. American agencies like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and others are doing what they can to help and are making good progress. We also went to a press conference and dinner with Prime Minister Thaksin of Thailand.

We spent the night in Thailand at a beautiful hotel...



...and then flew to Medan, Indonesia to meet with the President of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.



When that meeting ended, we were off to the Banda Aceh province of Indonesia. This area of Indonesia was very badly affected. It was hard to see how much people had lost, but encouraging that they are rebuilding their lives and trying to make things normal again. While they have a long way to go, American charities and government representatives are doing what they can to make it easier. I am very proud of what America is doing in each of these countries.

From Banda Aceh, we flew in helicopters out to the *USS Fort McHenry*, a Marine amphibious assault ship that was off the Indonesian coast. We had to circle the boat a few times before we landed – neither I nor Flat Stanley was feeling too good at that point! The sailors and airmen on this ship helped out a lot in the initial response to the damage caused by the tsunami, and the two Presidents wanted to thank them in person. You should have seen how pleased the men and women on the ship were to see these two Presidents together. Flat Stanley and I were very impressed.



When it was time to leave the ship, we flew in the helicopters back to our plane and then flew to Colombo, Sri Lanka. That night, we went to the President's House, a beautiful, huge house built by the British over 200 years ago when Sri Lanka was a British Colony. We saw President Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka as she came out to greet Presidents Bush and Clinton and we also got to walk around the house a little bit. What a grand old house!



We spent the night in Sri Lanka and the next morning, after the two Presidents greeted the U.S. Embassy staff...



...we loaded up again in helicopters and flew to the southernmost part of the country – the Matara District.

While we were there we got to see some of the damage caused by the tsunami and what American companies are doing to help. One company provided \$2 million in equipment to help make people's water safe to drink again.



We then went on to a camp where American agencies and non-profits are working to build temporary housing and help children who lost family members in the disaster cope with their loss. I wish you could have seen these kids in person – you would have liked them very much.



They were coloring when we got there and then they danced and sang for the two Presidents. They made us all smile!



We left the Matara District and flew back in the helicopters to our plane, which we then flew to the Maldives. Can you find the Maldives on a map? What an amazing country. It's made up of 1,192 separate islands – and the largest island is only about 4 miles long, yet the country is home to some 300,000 people! I wish I could explain to you the color of the water – it is as close to turquoise as I have ever seen water be. We got to ride in speed boats between a few of the islands. After being on so many helicopters, both Flat Stanley and I loved being on the water.



Sadly, when lunch was over, we had to leave to hurry back to our plane. President Clinton stayed in the Maldives because he was going on to a book tour in other parts of Asia. But President Bush came with us, and the next thing we knew, we were in the air again – this time for about 30 hours. We stopped first in Manila in the Philippines to refuel...



We all took turns sitting in the executive cabin – even Flat Stanley.



We landed just before midnight on the 22nd of February! Can you imagine how far we'd gone in just 5 days?

Thank you again for sharing your Flat Stanley with me. I can say from experience that he is a very easy to travel with!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karin B. Torgerson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Karin B. Torgerson
Special Assistant to the President and
Deputy Director, USA Freedom Corps

